



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CORRUPT FORMER U.S. BORDER PATROL AGENT SENTENCED TO 9 YEARS IN PRISON

TUCSON, ARIZONA –The United States Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona, announced that on February 9, 2004, Hector Hugo Esquinca, D.O.B. 05-02-1973, of Nogales, Arizona, was sentenced to 9 years in prison and ordered to pay a \$13,000 fine, by United States District Judge Frank R. Zapata, in Tucson, Arizona.

Mr. Esquinca entered guilty pleas on November 25, 2003, to one count of Possession with Intent to Distribute 24.05 kilograms of Cocaine, and two counts of Bribery of a Public Official. The factual basis of his plea agreement contained the following facts.

Mr. Esquinca participated in over 50 tape-recorded conversations with a government informant between August 9, 2000, and September 21, 2000, in which he agreed to accept bribes in exchange for assisting in the safe passage of cocaine through the United States Border Patrol checkpoint on Interstate 19, kilometer 42, near Amado, in the District of Arizona. At the time, defendant was employed by the United States of America as a United States Border Patrol Agent and assigned to the canine unit at the I-19 checkpoint.

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On September 4, 2000, defendant communicated with the government informant through a series of pre-arranged code words indicating that it was safe to bring the drugs through the I-19 checkpoint. The defendant knew that the informant would either be driving or escorting a vehicle containing cocaine. A short time later, the defendant observed the informant drive through the checkpoint in the midst of several vehicles. The defendant made no attempt to stop him or any of the vehicles around him, even though he knew that one of those vehicles contained cocaine. It was later discovered that the vehicle contained 24.05 kilograms of cocaine.

On September 6, 2000, outside his home in Rio Rico, Arizona, defendant accepted \$3,000 from the informant as payment for allowing a load of purported drugs to pass through the checkpoint on August 22, 2000. On September 21, 2000, inside his home in Rio Rico, Arizona, defendant accepted an additional \$10,000 from the informant, as payment for allowing the September 4, 2000, cocaine load to pass through the checkpoint.

At today's hearing, Judge Zapata sentenced Mr. Esquinca to 9 years in prison on the cocaine count, which will run concurrent with the 5 year concurrent sentences on the two bribery counts. Additionally, Judge Zapata ordered defendant to pay a \$13,000 fine to the United States government.

The investigation in this case was conducted by the Southern Arizona Corruption Task Force, which includes agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office of Public Responsibility (ICE/OPR), Department of Justice Office of Inspector General (DOJ/OIG), and the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation Division (IRS/CID). The task force also received assistance in this investigation from the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office of Investigation- Nogales (ICE-Nogales), the Santa Cruz County Metro Task Force, and the United States Border Patrol.

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The prosecution was handled by Mary Sue Feldmeier, Assistant United States Attorney, District of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona.

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